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VILLAGE OF FORT ASSINIBOINE

INFORMATION REPORT

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Municipal Services Branch
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Village of Fort Assiniboine, after receiving a petition from residents requesting a plebiscite on dissolution, asked Alberta Municipal Affairs for an information report on the issue.

Dissolution of Alberta municipalities is not a common occurrence. The most recent occurred on January 1, 1991 when the Village of Wildwood dissolved into I.D. #14. Wildwood was suffering from a declining population, an aging population, and a mounting burden of debt and taxation.

In our review of the Village of Fort Assiniboine, it was found that the levels of services within the community were reasonable by the standards of most residents. The Village's financial position was considered good.

During the course of the interviews several themes emerged as follows:

- a dissatisfaction with the current municipal structure and political representation,
- a feeling that services may be better with dissolution, and
- a feeling that taxation might be reduced with dissolution.

While three options were identified, the report concentrates on only two of them - maintaining the status quo and dissolution. The option of obtaining increased financial assistance did not appear feasible. The impact of the two options is summarized in Table 1.

Should the Village council decide to hold a plebiscite, it will be up to council to decide whether just resident property owners or all residents will be eligible to vote. The ultimate decision to request the Minister to dissolve the Village is also a decision of Council.

Summary

The financial and service level differences between the Village of Fort Assiniboine and Improvement District #15 appear minor. The real question which the Village residents must answer is how much do they value local autonomy versus how dissatisfied they are with the current municipal structure.

TABLE 1 - SUMMARY OF OPTIONS

ISSUES/CONCERNS	STATUS QUO	DISSOLUTION
1. What is current debt position	Below average	No change
1. Would debt be paid off?	No. change	No, would remain with properties
2. Would property tax decrease	No	Depends on I.D. #15 policy. Current estimate is for a minimal decrease.
3. Would utility charges decrease	No	No
4. Would community lose government grants?	No	Yes
5. Would there be reduced number of councillors at conferences?	Council policy	I.D. council policy
6. Access to administrative resources.	1 administrative Staff	More administrative staff.
7. Office Location	Central in community	I.D. suboffice, 2 miles from Village
8. Service provision	Use of contractors	Depends on I.D. policy
9. Response to service requests	Depends on council policy	Depends on council policy
10. Local Autonomy	Yes	No
11. Local Representation	Yes - 3 councillors	No -1 councillor for division
12. Representation from outside of community?	No	Possible

TABLE 1 - SUMMARY OF OPTIONS

ISSUES/CONCERNS	STATUS QUO	DISSOLUTION
13. Council Effective	Not guaranteed under any status. their ability to work as a team	Dependent on individuals elected and
14. Number of potential candidates	Depends on willingness to serve.	May increase because of greater population.
15. Quality of representation	Depends on who runs	Depends on who runs
16. Sense of Community	Depends on community	Depends on community

INTRODUCTION

In November of 1990, residents of the Village of Fort Assiniboine felt concerned regarding the viability of their community and petitioned their council to hold a plebiscite to dissolve the Village. In response to this petition, Council requested the assistance of Alberta Municipal Affairs in reviewing the municipality's status and in providing information to assist residents in evaluating their future. The purpose of the study is to provide a review of the options open to the Village of Fort Assiniboine regarding municipal status, together with an initial analysis of the possible impacts these options may have on the residents.

The primary focus of the study is on municipal structure and status, service provision, demographics and economic factors. The study highlights the social factors which the Village will also wish to consider. In examining the option of dissolution, the study reviews the potential differences in service levels and examines, to a limited extent, the impact of dissolution on both the Village and Improvement District #15 (I.D. #15).

The study utilized the financial data of the Village for 1990. The study also used 1989 data for the Village and for other municipalities for comparative purposes.

The process was as follows:

1. A background review of the history, demographics, economy and financial situation of the Village and its region.

2. Meetings were held with the Village administrator, councillors, I.D. #15 administration and councillors. Interviews were held with selected ratepayers in the Village representing both sides of the dissolution debate in order to gather information regarding the issues.

3. An analysis of the financial data and interview information was carried out.

The following report is a result of this review.

BACKGROUND

HISTORY

In the late 1700's a fur trader's fort was built on the north bank of the Athabasca River and was named Athabasca River House. Hudson's Bay Company records show that the fort was later renamed Fort Assiniboine in honour of the Assiniboine Indians. (Assiniboine means cooking with hot stones.) Beginning in 1897 the fort also served as a supply point on the Klondyke Trail and settlers from the area were hired as guides during the gold rush. The construction of a river ferry at Holmes Crossing brought additional settlers to the area around 1906 when the district began expanding with the establishment of many farms.

The hamlet of Fort Assiniboine was incorporated as a Village in 1958. It was anticipated that there would be an influx of residents following a large oil strike at Judy Creek. The Village boundaries were again expanded in 1981 with the annexation of a quarter section of land thereby doubling the size for development. (See Exhibit 1). The Village is located in the southeast corner of I.D. #15.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Despite predictions and hopes, the population of Fort Assiniboine has remained largely unchanged since incorporation and currently stands at 214 (See Exhibit 2). Also noted on the graph is the population trend for the average population for all villages and one can see that Fort Assiniboine's population generally has followed the same trend.

Most recent demographic data indicates that the average age of residents has begun to shift, with the average age actually decreasing since 1982 (See Exhibit 3). This is inconsistent with the national trend and, given the lack of growth in the community, is not expected to have any significant affect on its future prospects.

The total number of students from both within the Village and outside it attending the local school stood at 256 in 1981 and currently stands at 216. This represents a 15% decrease since 1981.

ECONOMIC BASE

The economic base of the municipality is primarily agriculture. Oil and gas fields and lumber operations in the vicinity have resulted in the Village serving as a service center to a limited extent. Residents interviewed indicate that the largest part of the local work force is employed in community businesses or personal services.

FUTURE GROWTH

There is no expectation for major development in the region in the foreseeable future which might be of benefit to the Village of Fort Assiniboine. There are 3 small sawmills locating near Vega (12 miles northeast of Fort Assiniboine) as well as a granola mill planned near Neerlandia. However, these facilities are serviced by Highway 769, running north of Barrhead, and traffic patterns are such that these facilities will have a minor impact on the Village.

EXHIBIT 1 - VILLAGE OF FORT ASSINIBOINE MAP

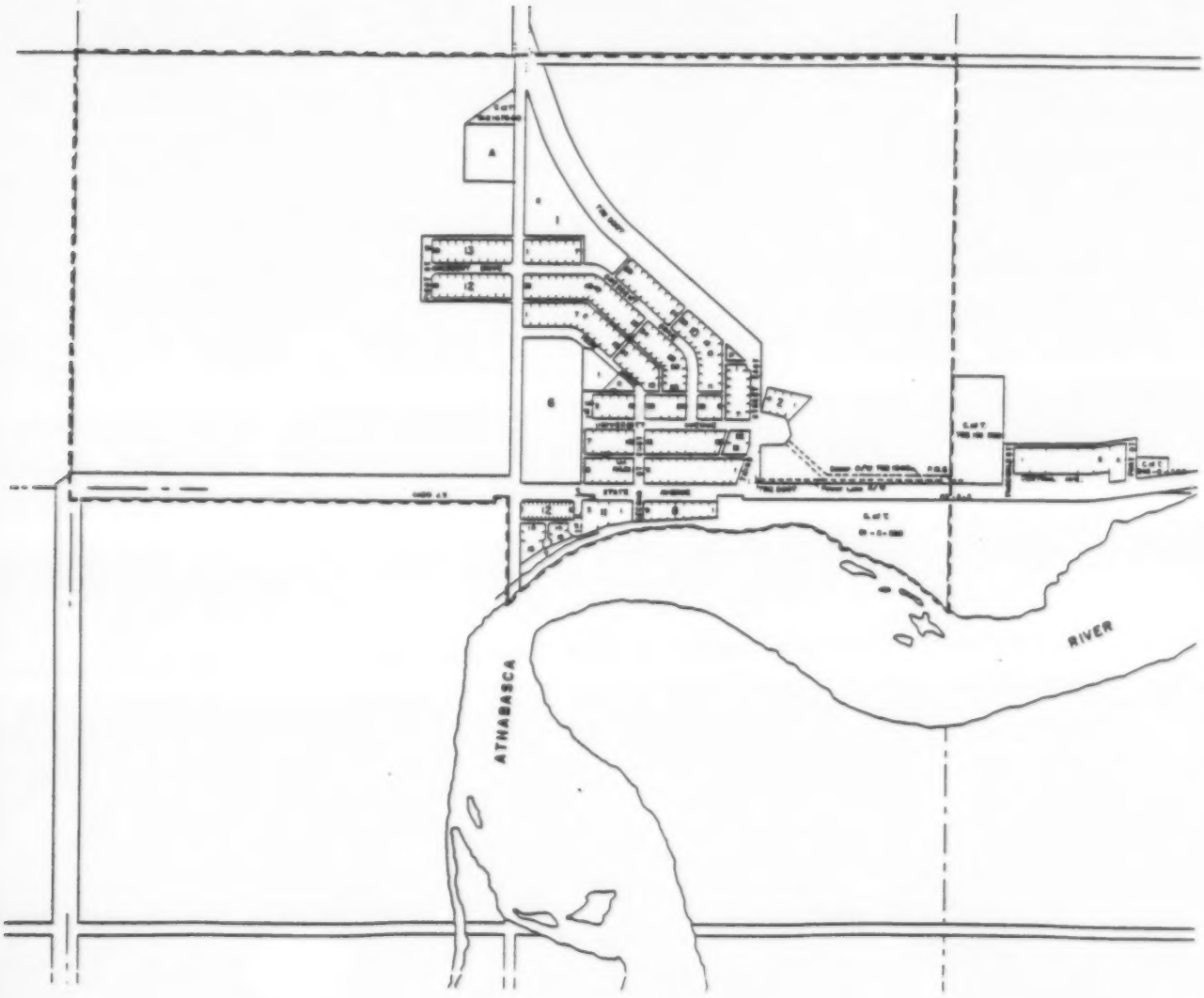


EXHIBIT 2 - POPULATION TRENDS

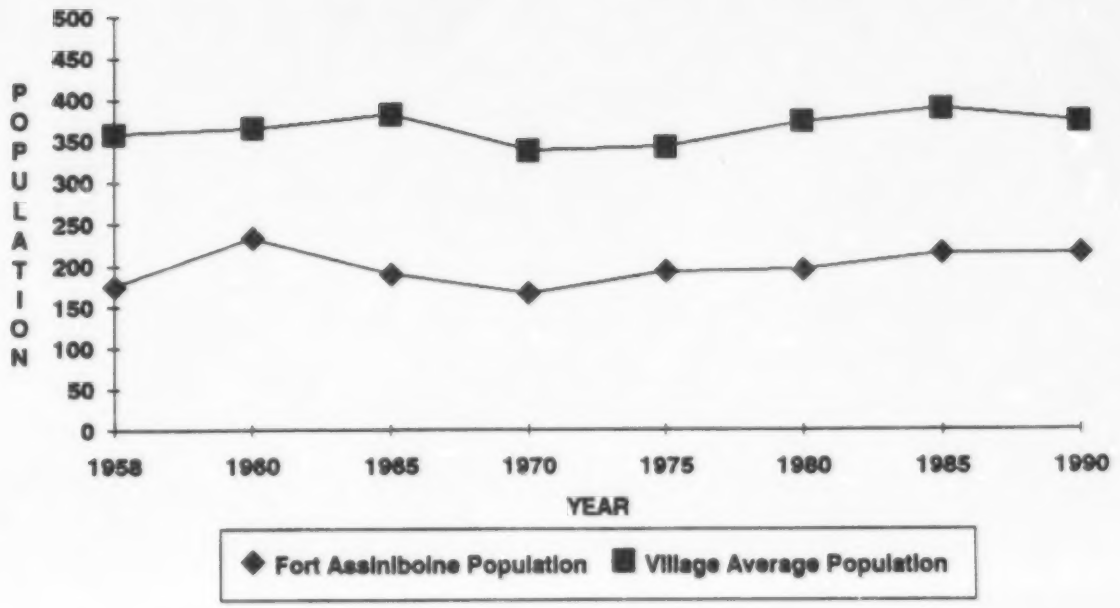
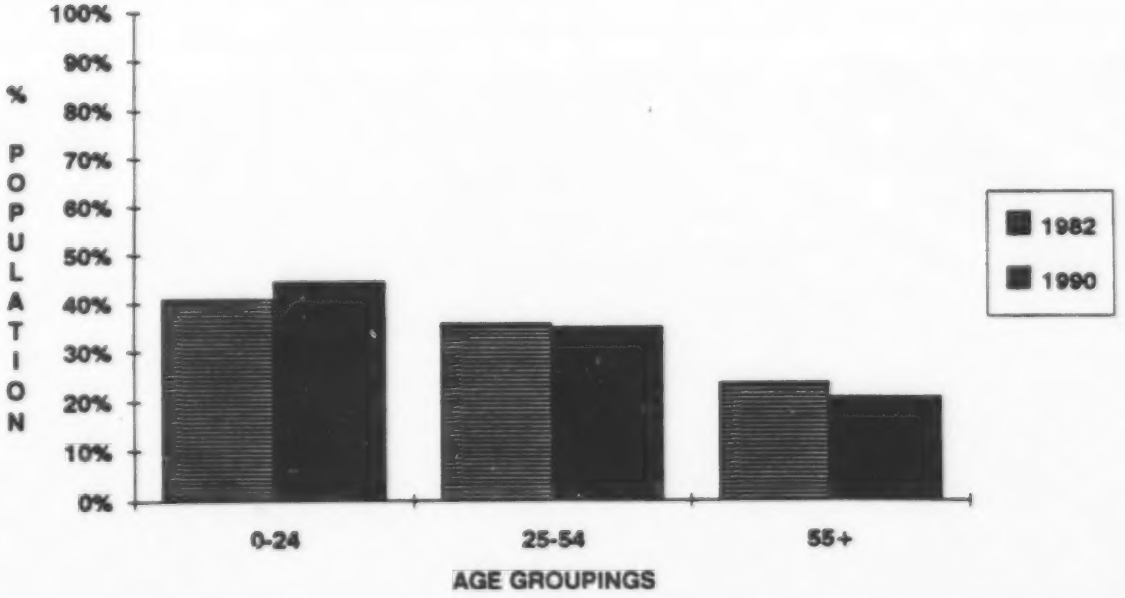


EXHIBIT 3 - POPULATION BY AGE GROUPINGS



WHAT IS OUR CURRENT SITUATION?

MUNICIPAL STATUS AND STRUCTURE

Fort Assiniboine is a Village incorporated under the Municipal Government Act (RSA 1980). The municipality is represented by a mayor and two councillors. There is one full-time municipal administrator.

MUNICIPAL SERVICE LEVELS

A review of the services provided in the Village of Fort Assiniboine indicates that there is a reasonable level of services. These services include water, sewer, garbage collection, road structure and maintenance (including snow removal), recreation and programs for seniors. Based on our interviews residents generally appear satisfied with the level of service offered within the community. A review of each individual service follows.

Protective Services

The Village receives police protection from the R.C.M.P. detachment located in Swan Hills. Fire protection is provided by a volunteer fire department and is operated under a joint agreement with I.D. #15. Both protective services provide adequate levels of service.

Roads, structure and maintenance

There is only one paved road in the Village, that being the secondary highway leading into the Village from the highway. This road is maintained by Alberta Transportation. The rest of the Village roads are either a gravel or cold mix top. At the present time, grading work in the summer and snow removal in the winter are done on a contract basis. There has been some dissatisfaction expressed with the quality of service in that it is felt that when the plow is clearing streets driveways are left plugged with windrowed snow, but this is a typical problem found in most municipalities.

Water and Sewer

The water system is more than adequate for both the present and future needs of the community both in terms of capacity as well as quantity and quality of water. There has been some dissatisfaction expressed with recurring line breaks that occur each year, usually as the frost comes out of the ground. Over the last several years about one major break occurs each year. The breaks are generally attributed to the improper bedding when the lines were first installed. One break per year is not considered unusual for Alberta communities.

The sewer system is adequately sized to meet the current and future needs of the community. There have not been any problems with the system.

Fort Assiniboine's utility charges per dwelling are $240.00 per year. These compare favourably against the average for all villages of $341/year with a range of $0 to $708/year.

Garbage

Collection of garbage is carried out by the municipality and is disposed of at the municipal landfill site. The present landfill site has a limited life span and is expected to reach capacity in 2 years. Negotiations are currently underway with I.D. #15 to develop a joint landfill site.

Land Development

Under an agreement with the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Village undertook to develop 20 residential lots. Four lots have been sold and the remaining 16 lots, which are owned debt free by the Village, are considered sufficient to meet future growth needs of the community. There are also isolated infill lots throughout the Village which could be developed.

Recreation and Programs for Seniors

Recreational programs are provided through a joint recreation board with I.D. #15. The Village contributes financially to the operation of the recreation board. There was no indication of dissatisfaction with the service provided.

The seniors of the Village run the museum and drop in center on a volunteer basis. This system appears to be working quite well.

Other Community Services

There are a variety of other services available within the community. These include: daily bus service for passengers and freight; natural gas, electric power, telephone, one school under the County of Barrhead School District No. ll, offering grades K to 12; a public health clinic once a month; a six unit seniors housing complex; and a Treasury Branch Agency offering basic services.

Intermunicipal Agreements

There are a number of joint agreements between the Village and I.D. #15. These include: Recreation, Fire Protection, Ambulance, Library, Seniors Lodge and Joint Landfill. It is noted that the Village has decided against participating in a Joint Economic Development Committee with the I.D.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Alberta Municipal Affairs uses a number of indicators to review the financial health of a municipality. An analysis of the Village of Fort Assiniboine as of December 31st, 1990, was carried out in conjunction with this study. The analysis indicated that overall the Village is in fairly good financial health.

Current Financial Position

Combined cash and investment balances at the end of 1990 totalled $69,522. The Village's operating reserve of $50,166 was fully supported by these cash and investments. The Village has generated operating surpluses for the past three years. In 1990 the annual surplus totalled $14,721.

Taxation

Total taxation for the Village for 1990 amounted to $83,946, of which $52,959 was for municipal purposes. Tax collections were reasonably successful in 1990, with 91% of the total tax levy collected. This is down from 95% in 1989.

It would appear that the Village has deliberately maintained low municipal mill rates because of increasing school mill requisitions. In 1989 and 1990, the supplementary school requisitions increased, but taxes collected for municipal

purposes decreased and have done so since 1986. While the amounts are not very significant, reducing municipal mill rates in order to offset education increases may assist the taxpayer initially, but this practice can erode municipal services over time and make it extremely costly to catch up.

In comparison with other villages with the same level of population, Fort Assiniboine taxes are not overly high. (See Table 2) While taxes may seem high to residents, they compare favorably with other villages.

TABLE 2 - COMPARATIVE TAXATION

VILLAGE	Property Taxation	Utility Charges	Special Levies	Total Taxation
Ft. Assiniboine	$596	$240	$170	$1,006
Alliance	$691	$375	$0	$1,066
Delia	$474	$354	$18	$846
Innisfree	$590	$240	$667	$1,497
Plamondon	$776	$300	$84	1,160
Rosalind	$594	$350	$86	$1,030
Torrington	$403	$240	$30	$673
Wanham	$474	$480	$107	$1,061
Average of All Alta Villages (117)	$636	$341	$138	$1,067

Source: 1989 Residential Property Survey

Utility Systems

The Village's water and sewer systems were self-sustaining in 1990. This means that the user fees and other revenues were sufficient to cover the operating costs of the system.

Debenture Debt

At December 31, 1990, the Village of Fort Assiniboine had $154,103 of outstanding debenture debt. This debt is owed for the Village office building as well as the water and sewer systems. In terms of the Local Authorities Board debt guidelines, the Village has further borrowing capacity. A comparison of the long term debt, based on information available from 1989, shows that the Village is not carrying a heavy debt load. Table 3 shows Fort Assiniboine's per capita debt as compared with that of several similarly sized villages.

TABLE 3 - COMPARATIVE DEBT PER CAPITA

VILLAGE	Population	1989 Debt Per Capita
Ft. Assiniboine	214	$753.00
Alliance	220	$668.00
Delia	223	$0.00
Innisfree	219	$942.00
Plamondon	236	$751.00
Rosalind	214	$419.00
Torrington	209	$444.00
Wanham	238	$271.00
Average of All Alberta Villages (117)	372	$831.00

Source: 1989 AMFIS DATA

WHAT IS I.D. #15's SITUATION

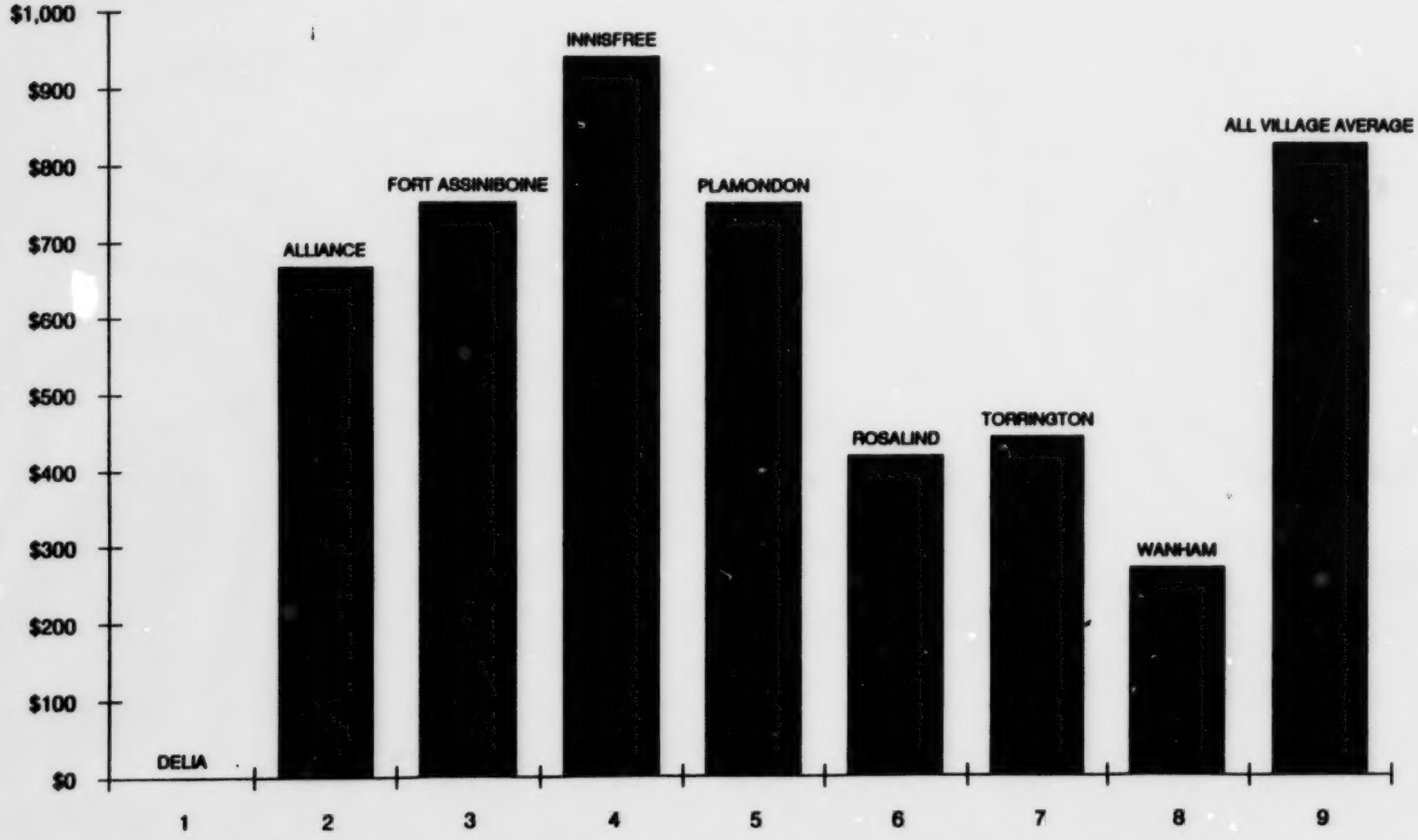
MUNICIPAL STATUS AND STRUCTURE

I.D. #15 is an improvement district established under the Improvement District Act. It is considered an unorganized territory administered by the Government of Alberta. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is the equivalent of mayor and council. The administration of the I.D. is carried out by the I.D. Manager who is an employee of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Advisory Board

In I.D. #15 there is an advisory board to assist in developing municipal policy. The members of the advisory board are appointed by the Minister after election under the Local Authorities Election Act. The advisory councillors are elected on the basis of 1 representative per ward and there are 7 wards in the I.D. The Village of Fort Assiniboine is located in ward 7. Advisory board meetings are held alternately at the main office in Whitecourt and the sub-office outside of Fort Assiniboine.

COMPARATIVE DEBT PER CAPITA



Rural District Act

The I.D. is currently developing terms of reference for a study as to the feasibility of incorporating as a rural district. This form of local government is a first step to becoming a municipal district. As either a rural district or municipal district, the operations of the local government, and the associated costs, could be substantially different from those of the current I.D. This study cannot address the impact of such a change, but readers should be aware that the way things are now in the I.D. may not be the way things will be in the future.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES

I.D. #15 provides a full range of services within its territory. The level of service varies within the I.D., with a higher level of service being provided to the hamlets such as Blue Ridge than to the more sparsely populated regions of the I.D. In general the service levels are comparable to those within the Village of Fort Assiniboine. The differences are as follows.

Roads, structure and maintenance

There is a varied road structure within I.D. #15. In some hamlets there is paving and/or cold mix top. Blue Ridge, like Fort Assiniboine, has some sidewalk. Alberta Transportation provides grading, snow removal and construction services to the I.D. This is one area expected to be heavily impacted by the transition to a rural district or improvement district.

Water and Sewer

In some of the hamlets, the I.D. operates a water system. Hamlets, such as Blue Ridge also have sewer systems in place. The utility charges per dwelling average about $300 per year.

FINANCIAL POSITION

Assessment provides a good illustration of the size of I.D. #15 in relation to the Village. I.D. #15 had a total live assessment of over $300 million for the 1990 taxation year. Of this assessment, 88% relates to Industrial/Power and Pipeline. In

contrast, the Village had just under $2 million of live assessment, 77% of which was residential. (See Table 4). (It should be noted that the Village's assessment base has shown only slight increases over the past five years).

TABLE 4 - ASSESSMENT BREAKDOWN

	Fort. Assiniboine	As a % of Total	I.D. 15	As a % of total
Residential	$1,533,450	77.30%	$18,940,650	6.20%
Commercial	$385,070	19.40%	$7,269,330	2.40%
Industrial	$0	0.00%	$149,125,510	48.80%
Power and Pipe	$48,260	2.40%	121,517,870	39.80%
Farmland	$17,320	0.90%	$8,678,490	2.80%
Total	$1,984,100	100.00%	$305,531,850	100.00%

Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs

I.D. #15 has a much broader base from which to draw and residential taxpayers carry a somewhat lighter load because of this broad industrial base.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Department staff interviewed administration and council of both the Village and I.D. #15, as well as Village residents, in the course of its study. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the issues and concerns of the villagers, their knowledge of the pros and cons of various options, along with the reasons behind the petition to dissolve as a Village.

In the course of the interviews a variety of opinions were expressed as summarized in the Appendix. The opinions expressed generally reflected:

- a dissatisfaction with the current municipal structure and political representation,
- a feeling that services may be better with dissolution, and

- a feeling that taxation might be reduced with dissolution.

OPTIONS

STATUS QUO

Should the Village of Fort Assiniboine decide to maintain its present status as a Village, there are both advantages and disadvantages.

Possible Advantages

*- Political and administrative control remains at the local level.

*- Mill rates, budgets, service levels and capital works projects are decided by your locally elected council.

*- Other initiatives such as joint cooperation between the I.D. and the Village would also be decided by your council.

*- Residents may consider it an advantage to have access to 3 local politicians to whom they can raise their concerns.

Possible Disadvantages

*- If the Village continues as a non growth community, the average age of its inhabitants will continue to increase.

*- There is no real expectation of growth. Without assessment growth, the provision of services would likely decline unless taxes are increased. This is because the Village will continue to face increased costs due to inflation and must increase taxes in order to carry out normal maintenance.

Under this option, the Village could examine ways of dealing with the local issues without changing municipal status. For example, if it was felt that there was insufficient council/resident communication, council could implement a newsletter or could provide ways for more public participation in local decision making.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

It is unlikely that the Province would offer any special or one time financial assistance to the Village. There are no serious financial problems and they measure up favorably to similar Villages. Further discussion of this option is therefor not considered relevant.

DISSOLUTION

The option petitioned for by residents was that of dissolution. In discussing this option, one must look at several issues - financial, political, social, and legal.

Financial Consequences

Debt: If the residents of Fort Assiniboine choose the dissolution option, it should be understood that any long term debt that remains outstanding at the date of dissolution will stay with the Village properties and would remain the responsibility of the residents. This debt would be recovered through a special debt recovery mill rate levied annually against the Village's assessment base for the remaining term of the debentures. In Table 5 the special debt recovery mill rate is estimated based on 1991. This is the major reason in assuming that taxes would not automatically drop upon dissolution.

Disposal of Assets: Upon dissolution, any decisions regarding the disposal of assets to retire the outstanding debt would become the responsibility of either the liquidator, if one is appointed, or the Improvement District Advisory Council if the Minister of Municipal Affairs should decide not to appoint a liquidator. No assumptions regarding the liquidation of any assets have been made for the purposes of this study.

Grants: With dissolution there would be little or no impact on most provincial conditional grants. Most grants are calculated on a per capita basis and so eligibility would simply be transferred to the Improvement District.

As a Village, Fort Assiniboine is eligible for the water supply and sewer grant program. Based on the current population of 214, they could qualify for funding of

75% of total project costs. The municipality is required to contribute 25% of the cost of any project under this program. This program would still be available should Fort Assiniboine become a hamlet.

Also, as a Village, Fort Assiniboine is eligible for the street improvement program. Within a six year time frame, they could potentially qualify for a maximum of $101,400, with the same matching costs (25%). As a hamlet, this grant drops to $62,120 over the same time period and there continues to be the matching requirement.

The Municipal Assistance Grant would be impacted by dissolution. Improvement District No. 15, with Fort Assiniboine as a hamlet, would have received $101,020 in 1991. The actual grant for the Village was $25,000 and for I.D. #15 was $93,366, for a total of $118,366. This means there would have been a net decrease of $17,346 (15%) if the Village dissolved.

Taxation: It is not possible to predict with any certainty what taxes would be if the dissolution option were chosen. Decisions on service levels and capital spending would be required at the political level. This analysis is based on the assumption that service levels would remain the same as are currently in place. No attempt has been made to estimate any capital spending requirements. It should also not be assumed that property taxes will drop because of dissolution.

Residents of the Village currently pay frontage charges of $1.50 per front foot on an average of 50 feet per lot. This charge is not comparable to the frontage of $6.50 in the hamlet of Blue Ridge. The bylaw in Fort Assiniboine is for a maintenance tax to assist in running the water and sewer system. It would be up to the Improvement District to decide whether this charge would stay. For this reason the debt recovery mill rate would have to cover the annual debenture debt charges completely.

In Blue Ridge the frontage charges are applied directly to pay the annual debenture debt charges and is not funded from general municipal taxation.

An analysis of comparative mill rates is found in Table 5. It should be noted that building assessments in the Village would likely increase about 5% if there

were a dissolution since Fort Assiniboine's last assessment was done on a different basis than the Improvement District. This information was obtained from the assessment office in Stony Plain.

TABLE 5 - 1990 TAXATION - RESIDENTIAL MILL RATES

	Village of Fort Assiniboine	Hamlet of Blue Ridge	Ft. Assiniboine dissolved
General Municipal	19.50	6.90	6.90
Special Debt Recovery	--	--	10.45
Supplementary School	14.76	11.83	14.26
Industrial Tax Transfer	--	.40	.40
Seniors Foundation	.32	.16	.16
Planning Fund	.16	.09	.09
Total	34.74	19.38	32.26

* It should be noted that Fort Assiniboine residents pay $1.50 frontage for maintenance tax on an average of 50 front feet under bylaw 181/79. This would amount to $75 additional tax dollars per year.

** Blue Ridge residents also pay $6.50 per front foot for water and sewer debt. On 50 feet this totals $325 annually.

*** Blue Ridge residents are in the County of Lac Ste. Anne School District whereas Fort Assiniboine is in the County of Barrhead School District. This results in different mill rates for supplementary school purposes.

TABLE 6 - COMPARATIVE TAXATION IF DISSOLVED

	Ft Assiniboine as a Village	Hamlet of Blue Ridge	Ft. Assiniboine dissolved
Assessment	$33,990	$33,990	$33,990
Tax Levy (total)	$1,167	$ 659	$ 733
Frontage Charges	75	325	0
Debt Levy	0	0	351
Utility Charges	240	300	300
Total Charges	$1,482	$1,284	$1,384

Note: Building assessments would increase approximately 5% upon dissolution.

NOTE: THIS TABLE IS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO TAXATION. IT IS A COMPARISON BASED ON 1990 RATES AND DOES NOT REFLECT POSSIBLE CHANGES IN SERVICE LEVELS OR INCREASES IN COSTS. IT ALSO DOES NOT REFLECT ANY CHANGES WHICH MIGHT OCCUR IF I.D #15 BECOMES EITHER A RURAL DISTRICT OR A MUNICIPAL DISTRICT. IT IS BASED ON 1990 DATA.

Financing Public Works: If Fort Assiniboine becomes a hamlet, its land owners could petition the I.D. #15 council to have 50% of the municipal purposes taxation from the hamlet used for public works within the hamlet. The residents could also request that some of this money be accumulated in order carry out a major project such as a road improvement program. It should be noted that public works includes the day to day costs of grading, snow removal and other forms of maintenance.

Political and Social

If Fort Assiniboine became a hamlet, the advisory councillor currently elected for the surrounding area (Division 7) on the I.D. #15 council would represent the residents until the next municipal election. At that time the electoral boundaries would, if necessary, be redrawn to incorporate the increased population in the Improvement District. There would be a loss of local autonomy as the hamlet would have only one representative on the I.D. #15 council. The councillor would

be representing interest broader than that of the Village. The I.D. council is responsible for representing the interests of all of the residents of the improvement district.

I.D. #15 could consider establishing a Hamlet Advisory Board which would provide the residents greater input into the decision making process of the I.D. and which would provide the I.D. with a source of information regarding hamlet concerns. These boards are generally composed of 4 or 5 hamlet residents appointed by the rural municipality's council.

Whether the sense of community will remain upon dissolution is impossible to say. This is wholly dependent on the attitudes of the residents.

Municipal Services

Service level decisions are made at the political level. The advisory council would have to consider what comparable service levels are in other hamlets. While I.D. #15 does have a much larger base from which to provide service, there is no guarantee that service levels would change. Any boards or organizations that are a creation of the Village would be dissolved if the Village reverted to hamlet status.

The Village office would likely be closed if the Village dissolved given that the I.D. has a sub-office located just outside the Village boundaries. Administration would be carried out at the sub-office and at the I.D. # 15 headquarters in Whitecourt.

Implementation

While there is no set process for dissolution it is likely a committee composed of representatives from I.D. #15, the Village and the Municipal Services Branch of Alberta Municipal Affairs would be set up to oversee dissolution of the Village. This is a process somewhat similar to winding down a business. At December 31, control would pass to I.D. #15 and the Village would no longer exist as an entity.

Any agreements that the Village is currently involved in would lapse upon dissolution. Part of the process of dissolution would be to ensure that any services provided under those agreements would subsequently be provided by I.D. #15.

The Minister has the right to appoint a liquidator to deal with the liquidation of assets and the repayment of outstanding debt. The Minister could appoint the I.D. as this liquidator. All excess assets, including any land owned by the Village would revert to I.D. #15.

The assessment base would be recalculated to the same base year as the I.D. #15 in the year following dissolution. This would be used for tax purposes until a general assessment is undertaken for the entire I.D. #15. Any outstanding taxes would be transferred to the I.D. #15 for collection.

It is likely that the I.D. would designate the Village site as a hamlet. This would ensure that the area would continue to benefit under certain provincial grant programs.

WHAT IS NEXT?

PUBLIC INFORMATION

An important part of a discussion on the change in municipal status is public participation. It is suggested that, as part of the process, council hold a series of open houses and/or a public meeting to review the contents of the report and to respond to questions from the public.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Plebiscite

While there is no legal obligation for the council to respond to the petition, the council is considering a plebiscite on whether the Village should continue as an incorporated municipality or should revert to hamlet status. This decision will be dependent on the outcome of the public meeting.

Depending on the wording of the resolution to hold a plebiscite, the results of the plebiscite may not be legally binding on the council. The ultimate decision to request the Minister to dissolve the Village will be that of the Council.

Voting

The vote on the plebiscite would be carried out in accordance with the Local Authorities Election Act. Either all "electors" or just "proprietary electors" would be eligible to vote in a plebiscite. "Electors" include all individuals 18 years of age or older who are resident in the Village on the day of the vote and who have been resident in Alberta for at least the last six months prior to the vote. "Proprietary electors" must not only meet the requirement of an elector, but also must be named in the assessment roll - that is, be a property owner in the municipality. Council must make the decision as to whether electors or just proprietary electors would be eligible to vote. The general practice has been to allow all electors to vote in a plebiscite since all residents will be affected by the decision. There is no provision to allow non-residents to vote in the plebiscite.

Becoming a Village Again

There is nothing in current legislation that would prohibit the residents of the area from petitioning for the establishment of a Village under section 13 of the Municipal Government Act sometime again in the future. The Minister would have to consider the viability and feasibility of resurrecting the Village. Such matters are not taken lightly.

APPENDIX A - SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW COMMENTS

- Several individuals stated that the reason behind the petition was that the proponents of the petition told residents they'd be better off as a hamlet under I.D. #15.

- Others indicated that villagers are unhappy with the infighting of council and there was concern about the ability to attract a large pool of candidates for each election.

- Some villagers felt they may do as well as the Hamlet of Blue Ridge, a hamlet in I.D. #15, if they dissolve.

- Some Villagers held the impression their debts would be paid off if they reverted to a hamlet and "they'd be sitting pretty."

- Some expressed dissatisfaction with council's policy decisions. For example, some residents disagreed with all council members attending the AUMA conference last year and felt only one should have attended.

- Some residents of the Village think they would have their own representative on council if they reverted to hamlet status.

- Some feel the reason behind the petition is that the villagers feel they cannot afford to remain a Village. Their tax dollars go to benefit councillors; not the Village.

- Some of those interviewed felt there was little opportunity for growth. There were others, however, who felt there were growth opportunities but that these would have to be vigorously pursued.

- Some indicated there is no sense of community in Fort Assiniboine.

- Some expressed the opinion that it would be a step backward to revert to hamlet status.

- Some expressed the concern that if they reverted to hamlet status there would be no self-government

- Many favoured dissolution due to the perception of total apathy of residents, infighting on council, lack of good candidates to run for election and the wrong people being elected.

- Some felt that the derogatory press has hurt the credibility of council, the Village and the surrounding I.D.

- Opinions have been expressed that there would be a more effective political voice for the region if the Village were to dissolve